

A Lesson in Protecting One's Heart by CrimsonIngenueFantasy

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Summary:

By the fifth grade, Beverly Marsh knows a lot of things. She knows all the states, and their respective capitals. She knows how to do long division with four digit numbers. She knows the water cycle and that plants make sugar through photosynthesis. However, she'll never need these things.

Lucky for her, she also knows useful things. She knows how to keep her trap shut when the guidance counselor meets with her for the second time that month, because teachers are worried about how quiet she is. She knows how to shoplift concealer from the pharmacy in order to cover up evidence of what her dad won't remember doing

the next morning. If the marks are too dark, she knows the best clothes to wear to cover them.

One day though, Bev starts not knowing things, such as why the teacher made the loud kid with the messy black hair sit next to her. She doesn't know why he won't stop talking to her, and she doesn't know if she likes that or not.

Someday hopefully Bev will have answers to these questions, but for now she'll have to deal with being clueless. Middle school is hard.

A Lesson in Protecting One's Heart

Beverly liked to think she was tough. In fifth grade, a guidance counselor at the school said she had severe trust issues. Beverly didn't know what this meant, but she did know that the night before her mother left, she had held Beverly in bed while they waited for the local bartender to kick her father out.

"Never trust a man like him, Bevvvy" Her mother whispered, "you'll only get hurt"

Beverly didn't exactly understand trust, but everytime she left her door unlocked at night, she would wake up with hickies in her inner thigh. By now, she thinks she could make the run to the bathroom with her eyes closed, because the stomach acid churning in her stomach wouldn't wait for her to feel around in the dark.

Beverly didn't understand why she "shouldn't let your trust issues interfere with current relationships", if trust issues were the only thing keeping her from waking up to the stench of warm beer breath being ghosted across her lips, then she'll gladly stick with the trust issues.

Lecture me on this shit when your dad starts touching you Mrs. Kellian.

She was in sixth grade when she saw Richie for the first time. Actually, they had been in the same school for the years preceding that, but she had mastered the art of flying below the radar.

The more friends she makes, the higher chance there is that one of them notices the bruises she artfully covers with her hair. The irony of covering hickies with a childrens size 12 turtleneck was not lost on her, it was just easier to not think about it.

The teacher had gotten tired of shushing Richie. As long as they were allowed to choose their own seats, the more Richie could whisper comments to Stan, and the more Stan could shush him, eliciting a loud response.

The teacher pointed at him with a two week old manicure, then at the empty seat at the table Bev sat at, the often housed her backpack, filled with notes of all the little sarcastic comments she wanted to say but didn't want to garner the attention for.

You see, if there's one thing Bev was scared of more than attracting attention, it was losing her personality. She feared that without speaking to anyone, she would lose the ability to connect with other people.

To remedy tis, she would write down everything she was thinking, then review it later. She thought of herself as pretty funny, taking comfort in the fact that if there was a time she felt comfortable to talk, she would have a decent personality.

"Hey there red, whats your name?" Richie asked as he dropped into the seat loudly, not seeming like he really gave two shits.

"Uh.. Bev"

"Thats a nice name"

"Thanks"

And that was the start of everything.

As the days went on, Bev began to rue having a seatmate. She liked to whisper her sarcastic comments to herself, and having someone next to her meant she couldn't do so without seeming insane.

"Today, class, we'll be learning about rock layers"

"I'm more interested in how many layers of foundation it took to hide you green scales" Bev whispered

Richie burst into laughter.

"Is something funny Mr. Tozier?" The teacher demanded, whipping around to give him the stink eye"

"Nothing Mrs. Leavens" Richie gasped out between bouts of laughter, before finally composing himself

"That was fuckin' funny Red. Don't know where you pulled that one out of but if you've got more of it then we're gonna get along just

fine”

“I’ve got plenty, and I have a name, you know”

“Beth?”

“Nice try”

“Ben”

“Now i’m just offended”

“I’m joshing Bev. I may be stupid but I can remember a name if it means getting to talk to you again”

Bev blushed, and tuned her attention to the back of the head in front of her

“Im glad for you”

Richie didn’t have a response to this, so he smirked and turned to face the teacher, obviously not paying attention. He was asleep within minutes.

The thing is, Beverly isn’t stupid. She never has been. Most teachers assume she is, because she rarely raises her hand to ask or answer questions, but she isn’t. The first time they grade her tests, the teachers almost always realize this girl could easily skip a grade, but every time they’ve asked her about it, she’s shook her head vehemently, not offering an explanation, let alone a goodbye as she hurries out of the room.

Over time, many teachers find her silence unnerving. They’ll call on her in class, and the “I don’t know” is disproven when they read the exact question answered correctly on the homework from the night before. Eventually, they stop asking her things in class. They don’t count participation in her grade, because they know she pays attention.

The only teacher that refused this was Mrs. Leavens, who was convinced the silence could be fixed by force, as she made clear in a meeting with the principal, Mr. Knowles.

“it’s not healthy John. Ladies her age should be talkative. I can hardly get the other girls in the class to shut up and say the pledge of allegiance. It’s been weeks since I’ve heard her say a word other than responding when I call her name for attendance”

"I'm sure it's nothing, Carol. Some kids bloom later than others. We can wait and see if her attitude changes as time goes on"

"This has been going on for years John! She's should at least be tested for autism or something! Or maybe we should look into her home life. I've had a handful of kids who have taken a voluntary vow of silence, and I almost guarantee there's something wrong at home"

"Carol, that'd a lot of time and effort spent on a student you barely know. Her father could sue us for an accusation like that"

"It's not an accusation John. If we get it investigated we have probable cause or something. I don't know exactly how the law works, I just want students to be safe. Not to mention we have got to find a way to make that girl talk"

"Look Carol, I know her Dad, he and I go way back. There's no way that there's anything going on there. If you want to make the girl talk, make her talk, but I'm not authorizing any investigations into some dead end all because you haven't given her enough opportunity to say her piece. Now I'll see you later Carol"

"Well if you're sure John" Mrs. Leavens said as she stood up from the chair slowly "I'll just try harder"

"That's the spirit. Some kids just need someone to push them"

Mrs. Leavens nodded her head determinantly as she left the room.

"Now class, who can tell me what year it was that Christopher Columbus sailed, and the name of the three ships... Anyone?... How about you, Beverly/" Mrs Leavens called to the silent classroom.

"I- I don't know Maam" Beverly said back weakly

"Are you sure?" Mrs. Leavens continued

Beverly nodded her head. She felt her heartbeat pick up as a few heads turned to her.

“Really, because you have it written right here on your homework” Mrs. Leavens said as she displayed the answer messily scrawled on the worksheet she assigned yesterday. “Now why would you do that Beverly? You clearly knew the answer”

At this point, the whole class started giggling, and Bev felt tears burn against her eyes. She didn’t respond, sure if she opened her mouth, the only sound she would be able to make is a violent sob.

“What the fuck was tha-” Richie started, making a confused face at the teacher, and cut off when Beverly put a hand on his shoulder. He looked down at her hand, and noticed she had painted her nails light pink last night, but it looked like she had already chipped off some of the polish.

“Screw you” Beverly grated out as she collected her things and stomped from the room, using her long red hair to cover up the tears streaming down her face at this point.

She slammed the door behind her. If she was going to make a scene, she would rather it be because she was angry rather than the truth, which was that her hands were shaking and she felt sick to her stomach with nerves. Normal kids don’t feel this way. No need to get noticed for it.

“Red? You in here?” Richie called into the dark girls bathroom. His only response was a snuffle from the third stall. “You okay Beverly? I’m sorry about Mrs. Leavens. She can be a real bitch sometimes”

“I’m good Richie. Th-Thanks though”

“I don’t really believe you, but I’ll take it” Richie said. Beverly didn’t respond at all

“I’m gonna go red. Hope you feel better” Richie said as he knocked on the stall door reassuringly and left.

Beverly let out a big breath and wondered to herself whether she was grateful to be left alone.

Author's Note:

Hey y'all. This is my first time writing so please keep that in mind. Hopefully I'll improve lol. I'll try to update regularly, but im also famously unreliable, so maybe don't hold me to that. This isn't the end though! It'll probably be a long one.

Toodles!

-V